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# A Queer American Evening

Taylor Bruenning  
*Winthrop University*

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# A QUEER AMERICAN EVENING

## TAYLOR BRUENNING

Dawn unfurled her golden fingers over the little, All-American town of Parry, New York, and with her rosy red lips, blew the gentle kiss of morning.

Somewhere in this town a postman walks along a narrow dirt path, worn by his own feet over the years, taking satisfaction in the mark he has left on the town he was born in and will never leave. He slips a letter into a makeshift mailbox—a tree limb and an old milk crate, that inevitably falls every year during some malicious storm but miraculously reappears.

The letter is addressed to a Mr. Croix Petit, whom the postman has never had the pleasure of meeting. Not that he'd really like to, or even have the need. He knows everything about him, and prefers to leave his appearance to his imagination. In his mind, Mr. Croix Petit hangs perpetually midair, one foot hovering over American soil and the other leaping from the splintering boards of a ferry, one that has just made yet another long journey from some alienated country full of people seeking a better life. The postman pauses for a moment and digs his heels into the ground. He wonders what brought Mr. Croix Petit to

a foreign land. Surely, he has no family here, and while he speaks the language, it has been almost six months and he still does not have a wife. He couldn't have left Paris to become a shepherd in a quiet American town, and be so lonely at that. The postman shook his head, and started on his path again.

A pair of eyes emerged from behind some calico curtains in the quaint little farmhouse over yonder—which, after roaming the land looking for a comfortable little place to spend the rest of its days, curled up beside a babbling stream and pasture suitable for sheep farming. Fixated on the postman, they did not blink or stray until the mysterious man was out of sight. When the coast was clear, the Mr. Croix Petit darted out to the mailbox so quickly that the curtains were half tempted to come with him. Without hesitation or even bothering to look at the sender, he ripped the letter open.

June 30th, 1919  
Dearest—

If you might find it suitable, I should like to arrange another meeting with you, preferably in private, and away from your noisy flock of sheep.





the bartender finally spoke, startling Croix and sending ripples through his drink. "I guess it's not so bad. I mean, I work in a restaurant, right? And Francis—he's the owner—he lets me experiment in the kitchen. Café de Moutons is supposed to be French cuisine, but a little pastrami never hurt anybody."

"That's—"

"Hey, you should meet Francis. We could use an extra hand around here, if you're willing. Unless you're all tied up with your sheep, that is."

Croix remained silent for some moments. He had never heard the phrase 'all tied up' before. At best he imagined himself huddled up in his flock, tied up by a rope and laid across some railroad tracks somewhere like in the picture shows. But he could sense the fear that an opportunity might be at stake. "No, no. I am not—tied up. Yes, I'd like to speak to Francis."

Moments later Croix found himself talking to a man with a worn face and brittle gray hair, although Croix could see that he wasn't terribly old—only forty or so. For the most part their conversation had been polite and introductory, with Francis inquiring about Croix's former life in France.

"And I just packed up and left, I left it all behind." Croix smiled.

"Amazing," the bartend

er leaned in from behind the counter. "You didn't have a mis-sus or anything?"

"No, no," Croix laughed. "I'm a single man."

"And you're how old, 32?" the bartender asked, amazed.

"Yes, 33 in two weeks."

"Well that's no problem. Ol' Francis here is still a fine young bachelor himself, say, 45 now, I reckon?"

"29," Francis smiled, revealing a slight gap between his front teeth.

"Well I'm baffled! Say, you two, why don't you want to get married? I know women can be a handful to deal with at times, but, you know—" The bartender's eyes twinkled as he repeatedly nudged Croix and winked at Francis.

Both men not-so-subtly cringed.

"Well isn't that queer," the astonished man muttered under his breath, returning to his task of polishing the counter.

In that moment, Croix and Francis looked at each other. They both knew. It was as if the universe had aligned so that these two men would click, here in this dingy, upstate New York, pseudo-French restaurant.